

Bidding in A Minor Suit

We have said that SAYC is focused on achieving contracts in NT or a Major suit but that does not mean that we should ignore the Minor suits. We do however treat them differently – I might suggest like stepping stones. If we have an unbalanced 12+ HCP hand that doesn't have a 5-Card Major, we have a hand that fits none of the criteria we have set forth so far for opening the bidding. With minimum opening points we can't open in NT or a Major but we should show Partner our points, so we should bid. Our only choice is to get the bidding started by an opening bid in a Minor suit. Do we need a 5-Card Minor? Absolutely not! Would you throw away a 14 HCP hand that looked like this: ♠AK84 ♥AK32 ♦T95 ♣T6? Or a 17 HCP hand like this: ♠AK84 ♥AK32 ♦TQ75 ♣J?

There are a number of suggested ways to proceed with hands that 'must be opened' in a Minor suit. The first and probably most commonly used is call Convenient Minor. Under this scheme one opens up in the longest minor which, in the above hands, would be 1♦. If both Minors are of equal length then we suggest that if they are 3-3 Open 1♣ and if they are 4-4 or even 5-5 open 1♦¹. One might see a tremendous amount of ambiguity in this strategy. But most people shrug their shoulders and soldier on; because the focus is, after-all, on the Majors. Isn't it?

I say, if we are going to treat some suits with regard then all suits should get the best treatment; even if we don't pay much attention to some of them. An alternate scheme and one I recommend every one start with is called Inverted Minors. The strategy is not much different, the bidding sequence is, as the name suggests, Upside-Down or inverted. We will show you both and you can decide which you prefer. The standard Response to a Minor Suit Opening is less complicate so we'll tackle that first.

Responding to an Opening in a Minor Suit

Unlike responses to Major openings, where the first thought is toward support of that Major, the response to a Minor Opening attempts to, first, redirect to a Major suit. The statement and question asked by a Minor Opening is: *Partner I have opening points, try to ignore my suit and tell me if you have any length in a Major suit.* Since the question is so different the response must be different. The Opener is looking for a 4-Card or longer Major in your hand – and not necessarily support for her minor suit.

Your first obligation as Responder is to disclose any 4 or 5-Card Major you might hold. If you do, you bid them up-the-line bidding ♥'s in a 4♠-4♥ holding. **The quality of the suit is irrelevant.** If you hold 5♠-4♥ or 5♠-5♥, bid the ♠'s, the longer or higher suit, first. The Responder's bid says '*I have at least 4 of this suit; if you do too; let's talk some more*'. The narrative has the connotation "ah you opened in a Minor so we might not be going anywhere and if we don't quickly find the Magic-8 in a Major we're sunk." If you don't follow the prescription just described, by the time the realization is grasped it can be too late to recover.

If the opener is holding ♠AK84 ♥AK32 ♦T95 ♣T6 any response in a Major is welcomed; but if opener is holding e.g. ♠84 ♥AK32 ♦T95 ♣AKT6 only a ♥ response 'fits the bill' and with ♠AK32 ♥84 ♦T95 ♣AKT6 only a ♠ response 'makes the opener happy'.

Once a fit in a Major is discovered then ascertaining the correct contract level can be challenging. It does proceed in a manner similar to that when the fit was found using a Major opening. The difference is Opener still has no knowledge of Responders points. With either ♠AT84 ♥K932 ♦T95 ♣T6 (7HCP) or ♠AK84 ♥AK32 ♦T95 ♣T6 (17HCP) the Responder's first bid, in response to Partner's 1♦ opening is 1♥. Now opener must show his point range by the level of the bid and judgment is required since Responder point count is still unknown. Thus with <16 PP Opener should simply confirm the fit with a 2♥ rebid.

1 Consider this holding: ♠84 ♥32 ♦AK32 ♣AK864. Convenient minor suggests opening with 1♣. This creates a rebid problem. If partner responds with 1♠ or 1♥ you would prefer a rebid of a ♦ as opposed to 1N; but bidding 2♦ is a 'reverse' requiring 17+ HCP, points you don't have that many points. DON'T LIE TO YOUR PARTNER. Thus to solve your rebid problem we suggest you open hand like this with 1♦ so that you then have a rebid in clubs. You don't want to rebid 2♦ – that's promising 6♦'s

If a fit is not found the information on holding in the Minor suit can be scant if one is using

Convenient Minor

If the Responder doesn't have at least one 4-Card Major, support for the opened Minor suit proceeds similar to bidding in the Majors: 1♣ – P – 2♣, the 2♣ response shows 6-9 and at least 5♣'s. The Responder must have 5♣'s because the 1♣ opener could hold as few as 3♣'s.

A Medium response hand holds little hope for Game in the Minor yet the response is the same as in a Major suit: 1♣ – P – 3♣, the 3♣ response shows 10+ and at least 5♣'s, a **limit raise**. However, nothing is, as it is in the Majors, gained by the jump, because reaching Game in the Minor suit requires more HCP, because Game is at the 5-level. So the DECLARER is stuck in a 3-level contract with, possibly, a very 'swishy' suit. And little outside support. Too much bidding space has been used up such that finding a Game contract, perhaps in NT, is very hard to reach.

Same story with ♦'s.

Short Club

Let me pose a real mind-bending question: if one partner has two 4-card Majors and the other doesn't what is the probability that they can find a 5-3 fit in a Minor. Given the limited bidding space the search for a 5-3 fit might be possible but finding Game can be very difficult. We can somewhat simplify the task in the Minors bidding sequence if we introduce the Short Club convention. The relatively simple concept replaces Convenient Minor. In standard bidding a 1♦ opening can mean the opener holds 3, 4 or 5 ♦'s; To show support Responder must have a 5-Card suit. If Opener holds 5♦'s, the chances that Responder also holds 5 is much reduced. Additionally, many experts recommend a rebid in a Minor requires holding 6-Cards in the suit. This is because practically any response except a limit raise has so many ambiguities in it that one quickly finds the partnership at the 3 level. The problem can be solved if one requires that to open one of the Minor suits, the opener holds a guaranteed 4-Cards in the suit. The short club Convention does this; it requires that to open 1♦ the opener must have 4♦'s. If that requirement is combined with the 5-Card Major opening requirement then a player holding 4♠'s 4♥'s 3♦'s 2♣ cannot open the bidding. The standard, Convenient Minor, dictates opening 1♦, but if we have the agreement that a 1♦ opening bid shows at least 4 we can't open with out violating our personal bidding rules. One is always allowed to violate standard bidding rules so long as they inform the opponents what the violation means but we should never violate our personal bidding rules – cemented in partnership agreements. Having the agreement that a 1♦ opening bid promises at least 4♦'s means that a 1♣ opening bid can be used to represent the troublesome 4♠'s 4♥'s 3♦'s 2♣ distribution and must be announced. The announcement is: "Could be Short" or "Could be as short as 2". Using this convention means that a supporting response to a 1♦ opening only requires 4♦'s. Now only a ♣ opening requires 5-Cards to support; we can support a 1♦ opening bid with a 4-card holding. We however do not recommend using the short club convention. Hands that require 4-4-3-2 hands only come up about 2% of the time. This means that 98% of the time that partner opens 1♦ she is actually holding at least 4♦'s.

Inverted Minors

To continue beyond this point one has to be familiar with the bidding of controls. The student may skip ahead to the section on control bidding and return here, or postpone inverted minors until control bidding is added to their bidding repertoire.

The major strength of the Inverted Minors convention is that it is structured to do exactly what the focus on Majors attempts to do. That is: Avoid, as much as possible, trying to find Game in a Minor suit. When the lack of a Major fit is revealed the shift is next toward finding Game in NT, This requires a compressed bidding space. How is this done? First we invert the meaning of the 2- AND 3-level responses:

Case 1, Responder has no 4-Card Major (best scenario)

1♣ – P – 3♣ the 3♣ bid takes on the meaning of a normal 2-level bid i.e. 6-9 HCP and 5+♣'s

1♣ – P – 2♣ the 2♣ bid takes on the meaning of a normal 3-level bid i.e. 10-12 HCP and 5+♣'s.

Inverting the meanings of the 2 and 3 level responses leaves most of the 2-level and all the 3rd-level of the bidding ladder available to explore for game in NT. It's the same story with ♦'s except it can be done with 4-card support.

Case 2, Responder has a 4-Card Major; Opener doesn't or has the opposite Major:

1♣ – P – 1♥/1♠ – P;

1NT – P – 3♣ the 3♣ bid takes on the meaning of a normal 2-level bid: 6-9 HCP and 5+♣'s

1♣ – P – 1♥/1♠ – P;

1NT – P – 2♣ the 2♣ bid takes on the meaning of a normal 3-level bid: 10+ HCP and 5+♣'s.

Note how inverting the meanings of the 2 and 3 level responses leaves most of the 2-level and all the 3-level of the bidding ladder available to explore for game in NT. Meanwhile the jump to the 3-level by the weaker hand has a preemptive² nature. Why preempt here? The bidding sequence up to the 1N bid 'advertises' two things 1. not-so-strong hands and 2. no Major suit fit; it opens the possibility for alert opponents to find their almost certain Major suit fit – at your expense.

We see that in both cases, when the Responder has an invitational hand (i.e. 10-12 HCP) and it comes time for opener to decide where the contract belongs, if the contract is going to be in the Minor suit the bidding is still at the 2-level. The opener may initiate a control bidding sequence to ascertain if the partnership could be better off in a Game contract in NT rather than a Game in a Minor which requires more and stronger assets.

Once the responder (in either case above) shows the limit raise in a Minor, control bids can be used to determine whether the partnership has stoppers in all four suits. With the 22+ HCP implied by the limit raise and a fit in one Minor and at least one stopper in the other three suits 3NT is often a better contract than trying to extend the contract to the 5-level.

If a responder doesn't have a 4-card Major control bidding to determine if a Game in NT is possible still might require more bidding space than is available so we have a special controls bidding convention. The convention, triggered by the inverted minor response that shows 10+ HCP, is as follows:

The opener rebids: 2♥ → ♥ stopper but no ♠ stopper; i.e 1st or 2nd round control

2♠ → ♠ stopper but no ♥ stopper

2NT → stoppers in both majors

Responder's rebid: after openers 2♥ or 2♠, 2N rebid:

2NT → shows stopper in other Major

3NT → shows all missing stoppers. (the other Minor and Major, if only 1 shown)

3 of original Minor → concern (no stopper) in un-shown suits.

If opener has stopper in suit(s) of concern to responder he is free to bid 3NT. The 2NT rebid should be relative clear so lets look at the most complicated example, where each partner only has one Major stopped!

1♦ [I have 12+ HCP and 4♦'s] – P – 2♦ [I don't have a 4-card Major but I have 4♦'s and 10+ HCP] – P;

2♠ [I have a ♠ but not a ♥ stopper] – P – 2NT [I have the ♥ stopper we just need to be concerned about ♠'s]; now opener

has several options: 1. With ♠'s stopped and 12-13 i.e. not enough for game, if partner is at 10-11 HCP, he bids 3♣ to show stopper.

2. With ♠'s stopped and 14+ bids 3NT

3. No ♠ stopper opener bids 3♦ the original suit.

After 1. if responder has 11+ HCP bids 3NT knowing all 4 suits are stopped.

After 3 if Responder has 12+ HCP and ♠'s stopped Bids 3NT else must be satisfied with part score in 3♦.

Note: Opening a Minor with the minimum 12 HCP, the inverted Minors sequence can be a bit iffy in total HCP for a NoTrump game. It is for this reason that I suggest that without a 4-card Major that partnerships should require 13 HCP for a Minor suit opening bid.

2 Preemptive bids are explained in Section 14 where we discuss Weak-two bids.